

# Intercultural communicative competence [3]

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## Introduction

The aim of this series of three articles is to explore in greater depth one of the most common rationales given for teaching and learning English in schools; in order to communicate with people of other cultures. In the first two articles, the elements of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) —knowledge, skills, attitudes and critical cultural awareness—were introduced and described. In this final article, I would like to consider the possibilities for applying ICC to the foreign language classroom in Japan.

## Whose responsibility?

The first question to ask is who should take responsibility for implementing ICC in the classroom. The easiest and most effective way is for the policy-makers (i.e. Monbukagakusho in Japan) to incorporate an ICC framework into foreign language education and curriculum. This is what is happening in many European countries, but it appears unlikely to happen in Japan in the near future, and so will not be considered in the limited space of this article. The next possibility is for textbook writers to incorporate an ICC framework into the textbooks. At present, none of the textbook series seem to have a structured or coherent framework for cultural content, but most textbooks (some more than others) include elements of ICC, and this can be useful material. The greatest possibility for developing ICC lies with individual teachers. With a little thought and effort, teachers can do a great deal to develop intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes and critical cultural awareness within the bounds of the present policy, curriculum and philosophy of English education in Japan.

## But how?

Obviously, the next question is how to implement ICC. Taking into consideration all the other demands made of English teachers (covering the syllabus, preparing for entrance exams, non-subject responsibilities, etc., etc.), the most practical and realistic option would seem to be the 'plus alpha' route. In other words, rather than radical change, English teachers could spend just

a few minutes before each lesson thinking about how intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes and/or critical cultural awareness could be developed in that lesson. For example, imagine that the aim of a 1<sup>st</sup> year class is to study part of the textbook which includes the key sentence, "Do you play tennis?—Yes, I do. / No, I do not." Using the 'plus alpha' approach, students could brainstorm sports in English (developing linguistic skills). With the help of the teacher/ALT, they then find out which sports are played in which countries (e.g. baseball is not played in Europe, soccer is popular in South America but not in the US) (developing cultural knowledge). They then take the role of people from various countries and play a communicative game, practicing the key sentence and variants (linguistic and communicative skills). Finally, a few minutes could be spent discussing why baseball is popular in Japan and South Korea, while cricket is more popular in India and Australia (critical cultural awareness). Such extension activities can be incorporated into almost every chapter of the textbook, although some texts obviously lend themselves more easily to cultural activities than others.

## Conclusion

The implementation of ICC into the classroom at the level described in this article does not require a radical paradigm shift. Most teachers probably already do the kinds of activities described above, using the textbook as a base from which to expand students' cultural horizons. For teachers who want to incorporate ICC into their English classes, the cumulative effect of 'adding in' a cultural aspect to every class (the 'plus alpha' approach), combined with a constant view of the overall concept and aims of ICC, will reap benefits to the students not only in terms of intercultural competence, but also in terms of communicative ability and motivation to learn English.

I would be very happy to hear teachers' opinions about comments made in this series of articles. Please e-mail: [lynne@waseda.jp](mailto:lynne@waseda.jp)